

# 10<sup>th</sup> grade: Literacy

**1) Introduction:** Service-learning is an excellent compliment to the English Language Arts curriculum. Much of the standards for ELA focus on students' abilities to communicate ideas through writing, story telling, persuasive essays, and the spoken word. Additionally, the emphasis is on moving students from a technical skills-based understanding of the English language to a thematic socio-historical understanding of world literature. Service-learning provides a context for communication. What do we write about and why? Historically, stories have often been told to highlight societal injustices and/or the remedies to those problems. Service-learning experiences will help students connect the writing of the past to their current realities while at the same time providing a framework for strengthening skills.

## **2) Definition of service-learning:**

Service-learning is a form of teaching and learning that engages students in meaningful service activities in their schools and communities as part of the standard academic curriculum. Integrated into (but not limited to) the school day, service-learning connects young people with structured activities that address human and community issues, and that provide opportunities for increased student academic engagement, civic responsibility, personal and social development and the acquisition of critical thinking skills.

The following concepts are central to good service-learning practice. Evidence of these elements as well as their alignment with Pennsylvania state standards and the School District's promotion/graduation requirements are key to model practices.

- **Student voice in choosing, developing and implementing a project:** Service-learning works best when students are involved in something relevant and meaningful to them. Encourage student participation and sharing of responsibility in all aspects of a project.
- **Identification of genuine need:** The "community" identifying the need can be the class, the school, the neighborhood, a community partner, the city, etc. Goals for addressing problem have the support of designated community and clearly defined goals.
- **Mutual benefit for students and community partner(s):** Students acquire knowledge and skills, and in return contribute a short or long-term solution to the problem. Sensitivity to needs and/or limitations of all parties is important.
- **Sustained student involvement:** Length of project can vary but should span a minimum of 8 weeks. Projects with greater richness and complexity may last a semester or an entire school year.
- **Rigorous, multidisciplinary research:** Projects should meet content standards in at least two academic disciplines and demonstrate writing and research competence. Research can explore root causes/effects, potential solutions or public policy related to the problem.
- **Ongoing reflection:** Reflection activities should occur throughout the project. They reveal cognitive and affective learning and can incorporate speaking, writing and/or multimedia strategies.
- **Assessment of student learning and project impact:** Evaluates academic, personal and social development as well as whether stated community need has been met/addressed. Rubrics and other authentic assessment tools are preferred.
- **Culminating presentation:** Presentations or exhibitions of learning allow students to demonstrate what they have learned for the benefit of others, including community partners.

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- **Final celebration:** Positive change and collaboration is hard work! Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of all who were involved.

## 3) Sample Project Description

A sample project description is included for your convenience. This particular project is not required, however, it is designed to fit the core curriculum for this subject and it reflects a common issue or problem in many of Philadelphia's communities. Teachers are encouraged to transform this project and take it in new directions.

**Criminal Justice Project:** Our justice system is an imperfect one. For various reasons, guilty individuals sometimes do not pay for their crimes, while the innocent are sometimes wrongly accused and convicted. Students will read about one example of this in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1.1, 1.3.A-C, 1.3.F, 1.6.B, 1.7.B).

For this project, students will read an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer or another local newspaper about a person wrongfully convicted of a crime (1.2.A, 1.2.B, 1.3.F). (Teachers can use the article provided, "N.O. Man Cleared in '84 Murder," or an article of their own choosing.) Students will also listen to the story, "Perfect Evidence," from the This American Life program of National Public Radio (NPR) and/or watch the award winning documentary *Murder on A Sunday Morning* or *Thirteenth* about mass incarceration (1.2.B). Then, students will research the issue of wrongful convictions and interview experts in the field (1.1.A, 1.2.A, 1.6.A, 1.6.C, 1.6.E, 1.8 A-C). These experts will train young people in their rights and responsibilities with regard to the justice system (1.6.A, 1.6.C). Students will also survey the local community to determine needs and ideas for change (1.6.A, 1.6.C). They will then lobby decision makers for more just procedures, such as the videotaping of interrogations. This advocacy will occur in several ways. First, students will write persuasive letters and essays to law enforcement officials, legislators, and local newspapers (1.4.B, 1.4.C, 1.5.A-G). Then, they will host a Justice Forum, inviting officials, experts, and young people to meet and discuss issues of concern in their community. At the Forum, students and community members can publicly make their recommendations to the Police Commissioner and others, while officials have an opportunity to respond and share their needs (1.5.G, 1.6.A, 1.6.C-E). Students will be responsible for planning this event, from preparing presentations, to inviting guests, handling promotions, securing space, and seeking media attention (1.4.C-D, 1.5A-F, 1.6.C, 1.6.E).

At many points in the project, students will return to Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* as a frame of reference. They may use reactions of various characters in the novel as points of comparison for their own reflections on the real-life cases of injustice they learn about in their project (1.3.B, 1.6.D-E). They may also analyze the author's motivations for writing such a novel in his particular place and time in history (1.3.B). Creative assignments could include: writing a trial scene similar to that in the novel for a real-life case in their project, writing an "I am" piece situating themselves in the shoes of an individual wrongly convicted, or writing poetry to express the feelings that arise when justice is not served. (1.2.C, 1.4.A)

## 4) Suggested Lessons/Activities

### Situating students in the problem

-Begin with a recent newspaper article of local relevance to initiate discussion of injustice in the immediate community.

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## Research / Learning

-Give students an opportunity to analyze how the justice system affects their lives on a personal and community level. Study statistics of incarceration rates in their neighborhood and discuss the impact this has on the social, economic, and spiritual health of the community in the short and long term.

-Do a community survey among both adults and youth to determine attitudes toward the justice system, it's strengths and weaknesses.

-Listen to the story "Perfect Evidence" from the This American Life program of NPR and/org watch the award winning documentary *Murder on A Sunday Morning*

-Invite local law enforcement officials, attorneys, former prisoners, and other relevant speakers to the classroom and/or Forum for workshops, testimonials, or interviews

-Research paper topics: Why do innocent people serve sentences for crimes they didn't commit? How is the use of technology (DNA, video, audio) changing the collection and analysis of evidence? How do race and class come into play in sentencing locally and nationally? What reforms are working in other places, and why?

## Creating a Solution / Serving

-Have students write a persuasive essay on why videotaping of interrogations will increase accuracy in convictions (or another reform recommended by experts). Use portions of the essay to write persuasive letters to legislators, law enforcement officials, and local newspapers advocating for this change.

-Host a Justice Forum publicly calling for this change and providing a space for meaningful exchanges between youth and law enforcement.

## 5) Sample Rubric

Rubrics can be used at all steps of the service-learning process. Each activity can have it's own rubric, and you can use a cumulative rubric to assess student work at the end of the project. Here is a sample rubric that covers student presentations at the actual Health Fair. This rubric was created on Rubistar, a free web-based program which can be found at <http://rubistar.4teachers.org>.

See attached

## 6) Multidisciplinary Connections (Content standards could be added here.)

Math—graphing statistics on arrest, detention, conviction, and incarceration by geography, race, class, etc; use mathematical analysis to determine costs of wrongful convictions to individuals and to societies

Social Studies—study of political and economic causes and effects of wrongful convictions; close study of the justice system; historical basis of current law; history of the social context in which *To Kill A Mockingbird* was written

Technology— use of Keynote/ Power Point to create presentations for Justice Forum; use of desktop publishing to create materials to promote Justice Forum; use of word processing to write letters to officials, and use of email and fax to transmit them

## 7) Where to get more info?

The Innocence Project (<http://www.innocenceproject.org>)

The National Institute of Justice (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/welcome.html>)

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The Justice Project (<http://www.justiceproject.org/>)

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (<http://www.criminaljustice.org/>)

Trial Lawyers for Public Justice (<http://www.tlpj.org/>)

National Public Radio: This American Life “Perfect Evidence” ([www.npr.tal.com](http://www.npr.tal.com)) (Archives available free online—Real Media or other player required.)

## 8) Local Partners

The Philadelphia Inquirer ([www.philly.com](http://www.philly.com))

Philadelphia Police Department (<http://www.ppdonline.org/>)

Defenders Association of Philadelphia (<http://www.phila.gov/defender/>)

Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia (<http://www.avpphila.org/>)

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This curriculum insert was created by Michelle Loucas, Director of Professional Development at Need in Deed, as part of a collaborative effort between the School District of Philadelphia and several local community-based organizations, designed to integrate service-learning with the core curriculum.